

The Reunification of Germany

Aufgaben

Der vorliegende Vorschlag enthält in Aufgabe 2 alternative Arbeitsanweisungen.

- 1 Outline the author's reasoning. (Material)
(30 BE)

- 2 "Britain has spent the last 100 years fighting against the facts of German power" (Material).
 - 2.1 Examine this assumption with respect to the two decades before the First World War.
or
 - 2.2 Examine this assumption with respect to the decade before the Second World War.
(35 BE)

- 3 Discuss the view that the fall of the Berlin Wall was "a European as well as a German triumph" (Material).
(35 BE)

Material**Martin Woollacott: Germans seize the moment of national opportunity (1989)**

Journalist Martin Woollacott wrote this leading article in the British newspaper "The Guardian" on 11 November, 1989.

The international landscape with which we began 1989 – the old, familiar structures of the two alliances, the Anglo-American special relationship, the European Community's halting progress towards greater unity, and the newer but also beginning to be familiar element of reform in the Soviet Union – is being transformed, and it is Germany which is leading that transformation. Insofar as the old remains, it is like an empty chrysalis¹, preserving the shape but not the substance of what existed before. [...]

For East Germans, watching Poland and Hungary, the message was there: things were moving towards the point where you could leave the country without real risk, and you could criticise the party without real risk.

Out of that realisation came the explosive mixture of a massive emigration from East Germany and an overwhelming popular challenge to the party inside it. The reaction of Americans and other Europeans to the summer exodus was, however, still embedded in the old thinking. The Soviet Union would only permit a united Germany if that state was to be neutral, the argument went, and that way lay the old nightmare of a Germany swinging between East and West. But the whole idea of neutralisation presupposes the continued existence of a world polarised between East and West, a world which is literally disappearing before our eyes.

It must now be clear that whatever form of unification or quasi-unification is eventually arrived at will not involve the neutralisation of West Germany in any meaningful sense.

Instead what we have before us is a German triumph that could not have happened without Gorbachev and Walesa², a triumph that was not planned and which is in many ways an accident, but which nevertheless has come about because both West and East Germans have seized the moment of national opportunity. In doing so they have pointed the way to a European future in which Germany will be the single biggest power, economically, politically, and perhaps even militarily, so far as that still matters.

For the rest of Europe this assertion of German nationhood has its unavoidably bitter dimension. Britain has spent the last 100 years fighting against the facts of German power; indeed our modern national identity has to a great extent been forged in the fires of the great conflict with Germany while our sense of our moral worth rests in part on our role in the defeat of Nazism. [...]

Can we entrust the future of Europe to a Germany which has still not wholly rid itself of a nationalism that hankers³, whatever is said officially, over the "lost" territories in the East, that still sees Germans as superior to other nations and races, that still relishes⁴ power over others?

Europe is a different place, Germany is a different country. The international order the British presided over had no proper place for Germany, but that which the United States brought into being after 1945 has given the Federal Republic a privileged if somewhat constrained⁵ position.

¹ chrysalis – Schmetterlings-, Insektenkokon

² Lech Walesa (*1943) was the prominent leader of "Solidarność", an independent trade union in Poland that challenged the Communist regime.

³ to hanker over – sich sehnen nach

⁴ to relish – Gefallen finden an

⁵ constrained – eingezwängt

35 And the closed cultural and political world of the old Germany has gone. Germans now are Europeans in a way they were not before, and indeed the demand of East Germans that they be allowed to be Europeans, with the same wide-ranging and unquestioned rights to travel, study, and residence as the rest of us was both a catalyst and an indication of how much things have changed. [...]

40 We may have our worries about the different future we see opening up before us – it would be odd if we did not – but surely we must see what is happening at the Brandenburg Gate as a European as well as a German triumph.

Martin Wollacott: Germans seize the moment of national opportunity (The Guardian, 11.11.1989), in: World and Press Special: The road to German unity. Reports and views from the Anglo-American press (ohne Jahr).